

# LEON SAY AT THE ACADEMY.

## PERSONAL MEMORIES OF EDMOND ABOUT.

FROM THE REGULAR CORRESPONDENT OF THE TRIBUNE.

PARIS, December 25.  
The sitting at the Academy the other day was not a bit Academic. A fluncheon, Leon Say, who has the body of a Flemish beer-drinker, and a face which has often caused chattering behind him about old Baron James Rothschild, came to praise two Academicians, the books of one of which (Julius Raudou) he damned because he had never read them. A lawyer, Maitre Rouse, answered in a "devil's own style," in which there was a touch of purely clerical eloquence, and more in the parts where there was an utter absence of charity for Republican opponents than elsewhere. Leon Say used not to be such a strong reminder of old Baron James as he has got to be of late. He has a pastor-like air when one meets him in the street, and I don't know what there was that marked him as a Protestant of a Nonconformist style, even in his palm-embroidered coat and a sword at his side. He is very clever and showed himself so on this occasion. But his paragraphs were abrupt and often inharmonious, and although he is not without feeling for the arts there was no music in any of his periods. One has to be in Paris a long time to feel the rhythm of literary French, however crisp, quick and bright are the periods in which it runs. Clemeanceau, who perhaps is the least affected of public speakers that ever mounted the tribune of the Chamber, delights in this rhythmical poise, and so does Grevy, who, like the Radical orator, chiefly aims at clearness and sincerity in expressing thought or feeling. Clemeanceau has often told me that the French he hears on the Boulevard, in the greenrooms of theatres, and too often in his own editorial room, strikes him as "un Francais des voyons."

Leon Say was the French of business men, but good French of his kind. He was not kinder to poor than to the rich, and his criticism of his writings showed that he had enjoyed them and keenly felt wherein their merit lay. But he judged him rather from the bookkeeper's point of view, or that of an editor, or of a statesman who has often had to buy the pens of literary men for journalistic or party purposes. Though about no more being translated than Bordeaux wine, rich in delicate bouquet, bears being decanted, there never was an author who gave translators so much to do. I knew about intimately, and enjoyed hearing how hard he struck while seeming to strike with a hand of feathery lightness. But Leon Say did not render full justice to the home qualities of About. I never met any one so quick to resent, so quick to forget a brush, so open, cordial and affectionate to friends and family, as the author of "La Question Romaine" and "Grèce Contemporaine." His mental life was too intense for him to live in this furnace of Paris to a ripe old age. About wrote best at his country house of the Schlittenbach in the Vosges, and felt how necessary retirement there was to enable him to store his energies, which went to waste in Paris. I don't say that he was obliged to leave Alsace he plunged into any of the naughty pleasures of "la vie parisienne" and forgot that he was not only a writer but a man of letters. He gave his energy wherever he went, he wrote, he talked as well, if not better, than he wrote, and enjoyed feeling that he amused. He could not help amusing, and his amusements never failed to call out sayings which heaped ridicule on his object. Nobody could understand his breadth of nature who had not seen him at his own table with old clowns and new friends around him. Who that was present at the supper he gave in his house the night of the first representation of "L'Ami Fritz" can ever forget it? All the stage "properties" in the dining-room and kitchen, and the costume of the Schlittenbach, and the costume of one of About's Alsatian bonnets was copied by the dressmaker of Mlle. Reichenberg, who personated Suzette.

I wondered as I looked the other day at Mme. About how it was possible to go on living with no about to keep the house in a perpetual state of intellectual excitement and to draw all about him to the study. The oldest son, Pierre, died of sheer depression, the constant missing of his father caused him to get into a state of black melancholy, from which he never recovered. About was a man who could not be content with a life of ease and comfort, he had to be by the total absence of scene and occupation; so drearily, had no vitality left to resist the chill, and in time he was in his grave. He was a man who, through childhood and youth forgot so fast losses caused by death, were much alive to everything said about their father, and some of them, cruelly, after the sitting at the Academy was over, followed her and her mother to Pere Lachaise to place flowers on About's tomb.

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